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Diplomat With Aggressive Style

George McMurtrie Godley

By MALCOLM W. BROWNE*Special to The New York Times*

VIENTIANE, Laos, Thursday, July 12—G. McMurtrie Godley, whose nomination as an Assistant Secretary of State has been rejected by the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, is variously regarded by those who knew him in Laos either as a paternalistic bull in a china shop or as an old-fashioned and effective bulwark against Communism.

Ambassador Godley, who ended his four-year tour in Laos in April, is remembered by Government officials, fellow ambassadors and newsmen as a diplomat whose style at times seemed more in keeping with the belligerent tone of the Theodore Roosevelt Administration than with the modern era of cramped caution imposed by confrontation between nuclear superpowers.

The 55-year-old career diplomat's admirers consider him to be the one American more than any other responsible for having prevented the fall of Laos to the Pathet Lao and North Vietnamese. They also point to the fact that he successfully helped shield the neutralist but pro-American Premier, Prince Souvanna Phouma, from right-wing generals dissatisfied with Laotian Government policy.

As over-all administrator of the more or less clandestine American war effort in Laos, Ambassador Godley was responsible for coordinating air strikes in Laos as well as sustaining the fragile Laotian economy. He also had a key role in directing the activities of a mercenary army of Laotian tribesmen and Thai troops sponsored by

the American Central Intelligence Agency.

American operations, conducted by a staff of more than a thousand in a country of three million or so, are widely credited with the continued survival of the Government in the face of what otherwise would have been overwhelming North Vietnamese pressure.

The Atmosphere Was Heated

While Mr. Godley incurred the hatred of North Vietnamese, Pathet Lao and other Communist diplomats posted to Vientiane, he alienated many Western and non-Communist Asian ambassadors too.

He is particularly remembered for a diplomatic reception at which he grabbed the lapels of the envoy of a large country whose relations with the United States were particularly delicate and loudly demanded that he stop divulging so many diplomatic secrets to the press.

A number of guests were embarrassed, and the offended diplomat told Mr. Godley: "Take your hand off me, Mr. Ambassador. I am the representative, like yourself, of a sovereign nation."

Mr. Godley has made no secret of his distaste for the press, particularly the American press, and for the United States Congress.

Chatting with fellow envoys he referred to a scheduled meeting with newsmen and reportedly remarked: "Tomorrow I'll have to see those little bastards of the press. They're as bad as those bastards on the Hill."

Western and other diplomats have sometimes found it risky to communicate their feelings about Mr. Godley. A senior Western diplomat privately confided some of his impressions to a newsman,

who took notes. The notes fell into the hands of an American intelligence agent, according to the diplomat in question, and within a few days were on the desk of Mr. Godley, who angrily confronted the diplomat with them.

Mr. Godley, who has impressed people on the whole as bluff but friendly, has never seemed to mind the sharp criticism that such incidents engendered even when it found its way into print. A powerfully built six-footer who likes to be called Mac, he has never conveyed an impression of timidity or embarrassment.

In an interview, he once said with a laugh: "The press seems to regard me as some kind of ogre. Well, that's part of the business I'm in."

He rarely disclosed information of importance to newsmen although he saw them fairly often.

After the Laotian cease-fire he told reporters that the procedure in case of serious Communist violations was that the Laotian Government would request American air strikes and that the United States would decide whether to carry them out. Pressed as to the American criteria for responding to such requests, he characteristically snapped, "That's my business!"

The Ambassador was on particularly close terms with Prince Souvanna Phouma and appeared to be liked by the Laotian chief of state, King Savang Vatthana. (All three are partial to cigars.)

The power that Mr. Godley exercised in Laos until his departure April 23 was not new to him. In previous posting as Ambassador, he served from 1964 to 1966 in the

Congo (now Zaire), during a period in which the American role was crucial. In 1964 he coordinated American military air transport with Belgian-paid mercenaries in suppressing a Chinese-backed rebellion against President Moise Tshombe.

In an earlier exercise of American power Mr. Godley was a State Department staff coordinator who helped plan the American landing on the beaches of Beirut during a threatened Lebanese civil war in 1958.

No stranger to clandestine operations, he began his Foreign Service career in 1941 as vice consul in Marseilles, moving a year later to Switzerland, the wartime headquarters of Allen W. Dulles, then with the Office of Strategic Services and later head of the C.I.A.

In Laos, Mr. Godley, something of a study in contrasts,

worked long hours but was frequently seen in tennis whites and enjoyed sumptuous dinner parties and good wine. He equally enjoyed his frequent airplane and helicopter trips to combat zones.

He and his second wife, the former Elizabeth McCray, lived with their two adopted children in a river-front villa here. One of the finest in Vientiane, it was only a few hundred yards from that of Prince Souvanna Phouma, but, unlike the Prince's, was equipped with a large swimming pool.

George McMurtrie Godley, born in New York on Aug. 23, 1917, was educated at Hatchkiss, Yale and the University of Chicago. After the war years in Switzerland he was in other European stations, in Washington on four assignments and, in 1951-57, in Phnom Penh, Cambodia.

One of Mr. Godley's favorite themes is that he would like to see the gap between the State and Defense Departments narrowed to eliminate misunderstandings between military men and civilians. He saw his role both here and in the Congo as primarily military.

Just before leaving Vientiane he was asked what he considered his major accomplishment in the country. "If the cease-fire holds up, that will be it," he replied.

A Sense of Deja Vu at CIA

Watergate Disclosures Raise Questions

"We were not involved because it seemed to me that was a clear violation of what our charter was."

Richard M. Helms, Feb. 7, 1973

"Dick Helms was most cooperative and helpful."

Tom Charles Huston, July 1970

By Laurence Stern

Washington Post Staff Writer

In the vernacular of courtroom melodrama, someone was dissembling.

It was either Richard M. Helms, the respected former director of the Central Intelligence Agency, or was it Tom Charles Huston, the White House architect of the controversial 1970 domestic intelligence plan.

The conflict was rooted in an appearance by Helms before a closed session of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee last February 7.

Helms was being questioned by Sen. Clifford P. Case (R-N.J.). It had come to his attention, said Case, that in 1969 or 1970 the White House asked that all the national intelligence agencies pool resources to learn all they could about the anti-war movement.

"Do you know anything," he asked Helms, "about any activity on the part of the CIA in that connection? Was it asked to be involved?"

Replied Helms: "I don't recall whether we were asked but we were not involved because it seemed to me that was a clear violation of what our charter was."

"What would you do in a case like that? Suppose you were?" Case persisted.

"I would simply go to explain to the President this didn't seem to be advisable," said Helms.

"That would end it?"

"Well I think so, normally," Helms concluded.

Case's prescient question was posed nearly four months before the public leak of Huston's memoranda describing for the first time the intensive domestic surveillance

program approved and then, allegedly, rescinded by President Nixon five days later.

The Huston papers implicated Helms and his agency in the 1970 intelligence plan so directly that the word perjury was being uttered in Senate offices by those who were privy to the secret testimony given by Helms in February.

One of Huston's top secret memoranda, addressed to former presidential chief of staff H. R. (Bob) Haldeman, reported: "I went into this exercise fearful that CIA would refuse to cooperate. In fact, Dick Helms was

top CIA officials joined in meetings with other intelligence agencies to draft the 1970 intelligence report.

By the time the Huston documents surfaced and the contradiction became apparent, Helms had returned to his ambassadorial post in Iran. He was never publicly confronted on the conflict between his own testimony that "we were not involved" and Huston's assertion that "Dick Helms was most cooperative and helpful."

Yet here was compelling new evidence that the CIA had been involved in domestic security matters which, by Helms' own admission, violated the agency's congressional charter. The 1947 National Security Act establishing the CIA decreed that it "shall have no police, subpoena, law enforcement powers, or internal security functions."

Incidents such as these breed a sense of frustration, if not political impotence, among those on Capitol Hill who have sought to place in the hands of Congress the countervailing power of oversight on CIA operations.

"The Old Boy business is so depressing," complained one senior Senate staff specialist in CIA matters. "The Helms performance was a love-in when they should have been blowing him out of the water."

Time and time again since its inception 26 years ago, the CIA has been caught with its cloak and dagger showing in the wrong places at the wrong time.

Six years ago the agency was rocked by its last major intelligence scandal—the disclosure that it had been secretly funding and infiltrating student associations, universities, labor unions, church groups and diverse other private organizations.

Tens, perhaps hundreds of millions of dollars in public funds were distributed without public accounting to influence the views and activities of supposedly independent organizations in the

through a network of tax-exempt foundations operated, in many cases, by an influential elite of bankers, lawyers and industrialists who provided a massive and respectable cover.

If ever there were grounds for a wholesale congressional review of the CIA's role in the public and private business of the country, the 1967 episode would seem to have provided the occasion.

"I'm not at all happy about what the CIA has been doing," said then Vice President Hubert H. Humphrey, "and I'm sure that out of this very singularly disagreeable situation will come a reformation of that agency."

But nothing changed basically.

President Johnson appointed a study commission, headed by then Under Secretary of State Nicholas DeB. Katzenbach, which reported back speedily that the CIA had been following the orders of the National Security Council in carrying out the covert financing scheme.

The Katzenbach panel called for a modest reform. It proposed a prohibition on CIA funding to educational, philanthropic and cultural organizations such as the ones the agency had been secretly funding. But it also suggested a loophole under which such grants could be made to serve "overriding national security interests." Helms was one of the three panel members.

Less than a year after the secret funding scandal broke, a group of Old Boys met in January, 1968 under the auspices of the prestigious Council on Foreign Relations to take stock of the agency's somewhat battered public position. The elite panel included the late CIA director Allen Dulles, international financier C. Douglas Dillon and two former heads of the agency's Plans (familiarly known as "dirty tricks") Division.

While the public rhetoric promised reform and tighter safeguards on CIA operations, the focus of the off-the-record discussion at the council's New York offices was altogether different.

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